

**Linda Clair**  
**Four-and-a-half-day Meditation Retreat**  
**Cold Ash Retreat Centre, Newbury, UK**  
**13 – 17 November 2019**  
**Transcription from Audio Recordings**

**File 3c – Friday afternoon discussion session**

Question: I have some questions about thinking. I think I've heard you say thinking is always resistance and resistance is always because of fear. Is that all thinking? Or is that thinking when we're meditating and when we're trying to be in the body?

Linda: All thinking.

Question: All thinking all the time? Then how do you function in the world without thinking about, for instance, before I came away, who's going to look after the dog and who's going to feed the cat? There are many levels in daily life where you have to think.

Linda: Well, you don't have to. To look after a dog – I haven't got a dog, but if I did... (Laughter)

Question: My list is endless.

Linda: Yes, that's the thing – it's endless and you can endlessly justify your thinking. People tend to divide it up in to good thinking and bad thinking, and thinking that's necessary and thinking that's not necessary – or thoughts really, rather than thinking. You tend to want to hang onto all your pleasant thoughts and get rid of all the unpleasant thoughts, but you have to be really quite ruthless and see that it's the thinking, not the thoughts.

For example, booking my flight here, I get out a calendar, I look at the dates I need to be here, I check the website to check I've got the right dates for the retreat, I go onto the Qantas website and I look – I don't need to think – I look at the screen and I pick the flight that's most suitable. And then forget about it. I don't need to keep thinking about it and I don't need to think to actually book the flight – I look. So it's more looking.

I do make lists and do forget about things a lot. But, do I need to be thinking about what you just said after this? No. Do I need to be thinking as I'm speaking to you? No, I'm not thinking. Thinking actually gets in the way of any sort of connection with someone. Do I need to think to put out the rubbish bin? No, I put it out and that's it. I don't need to think to put the rubbish bin out. All those little things that you get into the habit of thinking about, if you look at it closely and look at an alternative way to do it, you don't really need to think about it. And that goes on and on and on.

At first there are little things we see. Like, we can practice here not getting into thinking because there's nothing really that you need to be thinking about while you're sitting here. Then I started applying it to my daily life and I saw that there was really almost no thinking that needed to be done. But I could justify – you can justify anything you think about and say, "I need to think about that or that."

Question: I wonder if it's in the word thinking versus planning. Like, to choose your flight you knew when you had to be here. You planned and thought about how you're going to get to the airport.

Linda: No, no, I don't think about it – I look. Usually I look, and I might talk to someone and they might give me a lift, or I book an Uber and that's it. But there's not all this unnecessary thinking going on. And planning does not need to mean thinking because I look. I don't sit there before I look and go, "What will I do? Blah, blah, blah." That's what I used to do. I'd sit and think about it for 20 minutes wasting a whole lot of time and energy rather than going straight on and doing it, or talking with someone about it, maybe.

Question: I don't think I do that sort of thinking you're saying you used to do. I used to be very overwhelmed with things. I end up making lists. It's not a to-do list. It's just a list of things that I want to remember. Once I've written it down, I forget about it.

Linda: Yes, I do that as well.

Question: It's not that it's dragging me for attention. In my practice, I'm not sure if it's something about meditation or something about life, or both. I meditate quite a lot but not for the lengths of time we've been doing here. Then I do a lot of inquiry with people, and I often find that things come up in my body in the meditation, and are then very fruitful for inquiry.

Linda: What sort of inquiry is it?

Question: What I'm sensing in my body, very somatic inquiry. I don't know if you would refer to that as thinking or not?

Linda: It depends. Do you regard it as thinking?

Question: I don't regard it as thinking with my head. I'm sensing into my experience and inquiring into that and getting close to it. I find I make more progress. I get more grounding and more understanding by doing that rather than just sitting. I may be ducking the sitting.

Linda: Maybe. I don't feel you need to analyse. It sounds a bit to me like you're analysing what's going on in your body and in your meditation. I don't feel that's necessary. That's just me. But when you were talking about planning and writing things down, that's what I do. I started to change the way I live to make things easier so I didn't have to find car keys every time. I put them in the same spot and I still do that so my body automatically goes there rather than having to think about where it is. I do things like to make it easier because the memory does start to change. It becomes very difficult to go into it because you're not living by your memory anymore. But the inquiry, which sounds to me like analysing – no, I don't feel it's necessary. I don't feel that trying to understand this with the mind is valuable.

Question: Sometimes I find it's more giving voice to my somatic experience in my body rather than with the mind.

Question: When you were talking earlier about thoughts being recycled, it seems to me that whatever I give my attention to seems to make an impression with me. If I take an interest in a

piece of music and give it attention it keeps coming back – my mind keeps presenting that music back to me. It's the same if I have a conversation that's heated or intense, that will echo back to me after the event, and sometimes, the same with music, to the point that it's like torture the way it keeps coming back. Can you say anything about that?

Linda: Well, anything that you've got an emotional reaction to feeds the thinking and feeds the memories. And most of your memories, or probably all of them, are *your* memories, they're not usually factual. They're usually based on how you reacted to an event emotionally, and that will taint the memory of that event. So the events that we react to more emotionally are the ones that come back to haunt us because your mind knows that's what's going to get you and suck you into remembering and going over it, whereas the ones that you didn't react to emotionally don't tend to come up as much because you didn't feed that memory – you didn't create a memory.

Question: That makes sense. I tend to avoid things like the radio in the car and at home because I know how sticky it can be. Is that the wrong thing to do?

Linda: No, I think that's a good thing to do. But it's not forever. It's not like you can't listen to a piece of music again, forever. But leading up to that point where the mind does let go, does subside, it is good to use techniques like that, especially ones that you work out yourself and you go, "No, I don't want to do that," really do help. I used to do things like that. I'd watch a movie at home and I might walk out halfway through the movie because I was very attached to wanting to know the ending. I'd go, "No, I'll cut it and just go to bed." It was really hard to do sometimes – and I didn't do it all the time – but it was really interesting to do little things like that that really tested your attachment. I used to listen to the radio quite a bit and then I went, "No, I don't want to do that," and I left it.

I hardly ever listen to the radio now but I do listen to music. I don't get songs going through my head anymore. When there's that trying to remember, which is a habitual thing, as you're doing something there's this sort of delay where part of you is trying to remember what is happening. So you're never fully engaged with something or someone, or the music, because the music is making you emotional and the emotion is probably coming from some deep emotion within you, so in a way you're remembering the music – there's some sort of memory involved. And when there's not that delay and there's just this spontaneous – I hate to use the word – non-dual thing happening there's not that delay. There's not you listening to the music. It's just hearing and enjoying maybe but not all this other stuff involved – thinking and memory.

That happens when you're relating to people too. There's not all this background stuff going on – judgments and thinking about what to say next. That subject-object thing goes so it's instant. You've got no idea what you're going to say, what you're going to feel. It's so much more exciting living like that than trying to calculate how you're going to feel and what's going to happen next and remembering things. So I never rely on my memory now because it's not just going to happen, usually. I can go, "Yes, I've got remember this is on the stove," and walk out of the room and forget it straight away. If it's not there in front of me I'll forget about it.

Question: Quite dangerous! 😊

Linda: No, you've just got to be really disciplined, I suppose, about things like that. Never rely on your memory. Don't go, "Yes, I'm going to remember that." It's actually this incredible freedom, not

doing that. I'm still here. The house hasn't burned down. And there's all this space in your head and body! It's not clogged up with all this thinking.

Question: So discipline is when you've got something on the stove you're just there with that.

Linda: Yes. Or if I have to go out of the room I'll turn it off because otherwise, inevitably, I'll forget about it. I'll hear this noise and go, "What's that! Oh, I've got an egg on the stove." Or I won't even know what it is even if I hear the noise because as soon as I go out it's gone.

Question: I can see the freedom in that.

Linda: It's incredible! It really is. It sounds dangerous, "Why would I want to live like that. That's scary." But it's not, it's a freedom, and it applies to everything. And you're actually more in your body and more in your senses. So you use your senses the way they were meant to be used, not the way the mind tries to use them to always be seeking some sort of pleasure, usually. There's nothing wrong with pleasure, but pleasure is pleasure and there's going to be pain sometimes in the body.

Question: If you don't try and remember things, do you have photos of grandparents or pictures or diaries that you look at from the past?

Linda: Occasionally, but not a whole lot. I do look at photos sometimes, it's nice looking at photos sometimes. But I don't often photograph things. People call it "creating memories" – that always gets me when they say that. (Laughing) People are always talking about memories, "These amazing memories!" So yes I look at photos sometimes – it's fun – but not a whole lot.

My Mum died last year. Probably for the first six months after she died I did find it quite difficult to look at a photo of her. I felt quite upset looking at a photo of her. But that just gradually went. I still miss her sometimes but I just look at a photo and go, "Oh yes, that's Mum."

Question: Doesn't it give you a reminder of a memory of something in the past that means that you were thinking of that, or not? (Not usually, no.) So it doesn't take you to that point in time? (No.) Or if you've got a picture of you as a little girl on a swing or something?

Linda: No. I had this thing, not long before Mum died. She had this box, which mothers do, of all their kids' reports and music stuff and photos and cards that we've given to her. We went through it together. She was sorting it out and giving me my stuff. I was looking at these old reports from when I was at school and all this other stuff. I suddenly realised I wasn't who I thought I was. The memories of my childhood weren't right. The proof was there. I had a completely different idea of what had happened and what I was like. That really affected me because I've been relying on these memories to a degree still after all this time, and I've got no idea who I was. At that point – this thing about memory – it was like the last bit of relying on memories, any sort of trust in memories, went.

Since then it has been different because I've got no idea who I was. It was totally based on my emotional memory at the time to an event which my sister saw differently and my brother saw differently. It was all to do with me and who I thought I was. And I've been carrying this around most of my life thinking I was this person. Who cares? So what? And I'm not that now. So yes, I see photos of me when I was young and I go, "Oh, gee, I was cute." (Laughter.) But so what?

Question: That's great because that goes back to what you said that it's not factual.

Linda: No, and what's the point, especially if it's all a lie anyway, it's not true. It's just my idea of how it was, and who cares how it was? What I'm concerned with is now. I'm not using the past to superimpose on now. You can't do that and there's no point.

Question: I used to take a lot of photos as a child, I was always taking photos. Just recently I started taking photos but I hadn't taken any in the last 20 years. I didn't see the point in it.

Linda: I like some photos. I did photography at university but over the years I stopped, until I saw my old camera. I just take them on my phone now, just for fun. And it's nice but I don't place any great importance on them. But I don't really place any huge importance on anything except this. I mean there are things that are important, but nothing is as important as this.

Question: So this is important?

Linda: Yes, it is to me. It doesn't mean that it has to be heavy or serious all the time thought. That's what happens, when you realise why you're here – the reason for your existence – you stop looking for it and you stop looking for depth in anything because you're in that depth all the time. So rather than that, you tend to look for lightness rather than this depth.

I was always looking for depth before, depth in a relationship, depth in things.

Question: I feel in a strange place tonight. Today I've been struggling more with meditation than I did the first afternoon we were here. It's almost like I'm going backwards. The length of time that I'm able to hold my attention seems to be getting shorter. I'm drifting off or I'm thinking again or whatever. So on the one hand the work is getting harder. But I'm also conscious of the short time we've got left. The question I want to ask is, how long meditation intensive did you do in your practice? I think you did the longest spell when you were in Japan.

Linda: No, I did longer sits before that.

Question: In Australia? What was the longest retreat you did?

Linda: Ten days. I didn't do really long ones. Some people do a few months. I think a week is a good time. People in Australia sometimes say, "Oh, it'd be good to do ten-days," but no, I think a week. In Zen, that's what the norm is. I feel that's enough – it's quite tiring. And if you have longer, you tend to spend the first few days just mucking around, not getting into it because you think you've got forever. Whereas when you've got seven days or four days or five days you really get into it more.

But you do get tired and that's probably what you're feeling. You're doing this again and again and again, you're going to get tired. It can feel like you're regressing but that's not the case. You're just becoming more and more aware of the activity and what's going on and that becomes clearer. In a way, the stiller you become the more you see, the more movement you see. Whereas when you weren't as still you were more involved, but not realising it, in that momentum and movement. But when you start to come more into your body you see that movement more and you're aware of it. I

know for me it became more and more intolerable seeing that because all I wanted to do was be here in my body. So try not to judge your sitting on how much thinking there is.

Question: On the plus side there are moments each day when suddenly when something descends – a silence – and I'm almost floating on it. It's lovely.

Question: If you sit for too long – say if I sat for four hours – does that become detrimental?

Linda: No, it depends on your intention. It depends on lots of things.

Question: There's no cut-off beyond which you're wasting your time?

Linda: No, it just depends on a lot of things. The longest I've sat is probably about four hours. I don't think I've sat longer than that before. It depends also on the intensity of the sit, how much pain is going on. Some people say they can sit for hours and hours, but can they sit when their legs or back are on fire? Half an hour with incredible intensity can be very similar to three hours of not so intense. So there's no optimum, there's no rules, in a way.